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**AMBASSADOR JAMES F. MORIARTY'S REMARKS
AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF
THE USG-SPONSORED ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR
WOMEN MPs IN BANGLADESH**

Monday, June 8, 2009

Honorable Speaker, Advocate Md. Abdul Hamid, Deputy Speaker, Colonel (ret'd) Shawkat Ali, Honorable Members of Parliament, Honored Guests, Members of the media, ladies and gentlemen: Good Morning, Assalamualaikum and Namasker.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you at this first formal gathering of women Members of Parliament. I congratulate you on your new roles and responsibilities. Whether directly-elected or selected for a reserved seat, you embody the hopes and aspirations of all Bangladeshis, men and women, for a peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Bangladesh. As Bangladesh reaffirms its commitment to democracy, the U.S. applauds the promising efforts to more fully integrate women into the country's political governance. I hope that you found the orientation sessions over the past three days useful opportunities for information sharing and dialogue.

Women comprise almost 19% of the MPs in the 9th Jaty Sangsad. In addition, more women serve in the Cabinet and in positions of great importance than ever before. The people of Bangladesh have clearly spoken in favor of increasing women's participation, both in making and implementing public policy. There are more opportunities for women in Bangladesh on the national stage now than ever before. Women leaders are also making vital contributions to development at the local level. We appreciate your aspirations, understand your challenges, and commit to supporting your efforts to foster greater leadership roles for women.

I am particularly pleased that the United States Government, through USAID, is supporting orientation programs for newly elected Members of Parliament, including sessions such as these organized specifically for women MPs.

To be a competent MP -- a capable legislator and an effective overseer of government -- requires both knowledge and dedication. Reaching out to your constituents gives voice to the people who elected you to represent them. Likewise, effective review of legislation requires informed opinions. Communicating with the electorate and law-making expertise are not enough for a lawmaker to be successful. Effective government oversight is the hallmark of a strong and credible Parliament.

An open, transparent, and responsive Parliament is critical to deepening Bangladesh's democratic roots. This transformation does not come without challenges. As a young democracy, Bangladesh can build on its achievements and learn from the past. Parliament can find a positive role for the opposition and for women and minorities. Bangladesh's friends and allies stand ready to help your country consolidate gains in democratic development.

The United States Government has a long history of helping all Bangladeshis, men and women. Since independence in 1971, the American people have provided Bangladesh more than \$5 billion in development assistance. While this assistance spans a variety of sectors, enhancing the role of women has been a crucial component of our assistance projects.

For example, with U.S. Government assistance, Bangladesh is making significant progress in key areas such as improving women's participation in the labor force; promoting greater access of girls to education; encouraging women's entrepreneurship; increasing women's access to health care; and enhancing women's participation in politics.

In terms of women's participation in politics, the recent parliamentary election was a milestone. As part of our support to the electoral process, the United States Government funded programs to improve women's awareness of their right to register and vote. As a result of those efforts, the massive participation of women voters- who cast more than half the total number of votes - was one of the remarkable achievements of last year's election.

As Bangladesh moves into a new stage in its democratic development, the U.S. Government will continue to support improved governance here. As part of that assistance, we will provide long-term support to the Parliament, political parties, and the Bangladesh Election Commission. Women's participation and empowerment are an integral part of all of these

development activities. We believe that Bangladesh has set ambitious, but achievable, goals for women's activism in politics, including within political parties. We pledge our full support for those goals.

Throughout the world today, including in Bangladesh, women are agents for change, arbiters of peace, advocates of development, and allies in promoting good governance. As MPs and representatives of Bangladeshi citizens, your public service benefits both men and women. As women representatives, you shoulder the additional responsibility of serving as role models to inspire more women leaders, to promote issue-based dialogue, and to nurture public confidence in politics. This is the promise of meaningful change.

America is proud to support you in your efforts to make Bangladesh more prosperous and democratic. I encourage you to support Bangladeshi women to help them realize their full potential and contribute to this great country.

We welcome your suggestions on how best to assist parliamentary development and advance the critical role of women MPs.

Thank you, again, for your participation in this program. And thank you to the organizers for their hard work in making this event a great success.

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**As prepared for delivery*